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SIX TYPES OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACTS: THEIR AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT AND EMPLOYABILITY

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to identify a variety of employment relationships based upon an economy-wide, representative sample. We turn to psychological contract studies examining different types of psychological contracts. We expand two existing typologies by incorporating multiple features or underlying dimensions of psychological contracts. Such a feature-oriented approach allows us to construct a meaningful conceptualization of employer and employee obligations across different settings and to identify multiple types of psychological contracts in which combinations of different dimensions are prevalent. The cluster analysis indicates the existence of six types of psychological contracts, all having different patterns of mutual expectations: an instrumental, weak, loyal, unattached, investing and strong psychological contract. To validate the six-cluster solution, we develop clusters' profiles based upon individual, job, formal contract and organizational characteristics and further differentiate between the clusters by examining their outcomes in terms of affective commitment and employability.

Introduction

During the last decade, the workplace has changed due to organizational transitions such as mergers and acquisitions, restructurings and downsizings and privatizations. These transitions emphasizing flexibility and cost reduction have not only impacted organizations and jobs but also the employer-employee relationship, bringing about a new employment contract (Burke & Cooper, 2002). This new employment relationship is sometimes described as a 'new deal' (Herriot & Pemberton, 1995), a 'protean' career (Hall & Moss, 1998) or a 'boundaryless career' (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994). Employers can no longer offer job security and long-term career opportunities but are responsible for providing their employees an environment for growth and learning so they get the experience and training needed to be employable in the organization or elsewhere. Consequently, the primary expectations towards employees are no longer focused on loyalty and commitment but on adding value and being responsible for one's own career (Hall & Moss, 1998; McCarthy & Hall, 2000).

While current literature is focusing extensively on discussing this new deal and its consequences, the question remains to what extent this new contract is widespread across employment relationships. It is the purpose of this study to examine employment relationships across a representative sample of the working population instead of expert informants or targeted populations. Through using a stratified random sample, this study aims to identify a variety of employment relationships instead of the bipolar distinction of old versus new deals.

One way to examine the new employment relationship is by approaching employment relationships as psychological contracts (Herriot, 2001; Rousseau, 1995). This concept of psychological contract can be defined as an exchange agreement of promises and contributions between two parties, an employee and an employer. It contains an individual's belief regarding the mutual obligations of both parties to the relationship (Rousseau, 1990; 1995). Therefore, research on psychological contracts provides the opportunity to understand employment relationships by examining the types of obligations that both parties have promised each other. It can be argued that the initial anger at the breaking of the old deal of security for loyalty has given way to a recognition that psychological contracts have changed (Herriot, 2001). The question however remains whether one can only distinguish between old and new psychological contracts or whether multiple types of psychological contracts can be distinguished.

To address this question, we turn to psychological contract studies that examine different types of psychological contracts. We start by presenting

Rousseau's (1990; 1995) typology of transactional versus relational contracts and Shore and Barksdale's (1998) typology of balance and level of obligation, and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of these typologies in light of this study's purpose. We further build on these typologies by conceptualizing psychological contracts in terms of their features or underlying dimensions instead of their content. After having presented the features of psychological contracts used in this study, we discuss the large representative sample of 1,106 employees more in detail. In the results section, we present the six cluster solution as well as its validation. This validation occurs through developing clusters' profiles based upon individual, job, formal contract and organizational characteristics and through examining the clusters' outcomes in terms of affective commitment and employability.

Types of psychological contracts

To theoretically ground our search for multiple types of employment relationships, we turn to studies on types of psychological contracts. We selected two typologies from our literature review. One well-known typology is the distinction between transactional and relational contracts (Rousseau, 1990; 1995). A second, more recent, typology is developed by Shore and Barksdale (1998) focusing on the degree of balance and the level of obligations. We present both typologies and discuss their strengths and weaknesses in light of this study's aim.

Transactional versus relational contracts

Rousseau (1990; 1995) has been one of the first researchers to distinguish two sorts of psychological contracts: transactional and relational contracts. Their different characterization is due to their different orientation towards time frame and tangibility. *Transactional* psychological contracts are characterized by a short-term employment relationship in which the performance requirements or mutual obligations can be unambiguously specified. They are fairly specific and economic in nature. In contrast, *relational* contracts are characterized by long-term employment relationships in which the mutual obligations cannot be unambiguously specified. They are both economic and social/emotional in nature, less clearly specified and to a degree open-ended (Rousseau, 1995). The two other types - *balanced or team player* and *transitional* - that can be derived from combining the dimensions of time frame and tangibility are less discussed types of psychological contracts.

The strength of this well-accepted typology mainly lies in its theoretical nature. The two dimensions - time frame and tangibility - that form the basis of the typology are two of the five dimensions that seem to differentiate con-

tracts most commonly (Macneil, 1985; Rousseau & McLean Parks, 1993). At the same time, by only considering two dimensions and leaving out the dimensions of scope, focus and stability, the completeness of this typology can be questioned. Another weakness relates to empirical research attempting to identify transactional and relational contracts. Empirical studies (Rousseau, 1990; Robinson, Kraatz & Rousseau, 1994) have encountered a main difficulty of finding stable factor structures across different studies. For instance, the items of training, career development, working extra hours and engagement in voluntary extra-role activities were in the first study (Rousseau, 1990) interpreted as elements measuring a transactional psychological contract whereas in the second study (Robinson et al., 1994) they belonged to a relational psychological contract. However, this difficulty of finding stable types across time and settings may not be due to lack of theoretical relevance but to the way of operationalising psychological contracts. Although the typology is constructed using dimensions, psychological contracts were operationalized in a content-oriented approach focusing on individual contract elements or terms. This implies the measuring of discrete obligations such as high pay or enriched job. Consequently, factor structures based upon one population have not been particularly stable when cross-validated on another population (Barksdale & Shore, 1997). It is therefore that a feature-oriented approach which compares the contract to some attribute or dimension such as the degree to which the contract is implicit/explicit or stable/unstable over time, is discussed as an opportunity for further research (Rousseau & Tijoriwala, 1998). We further discuss the advantages of such a feature-oriented approach when presenting our conceptualization and operationalization of psychological contracts.

Degree of balance and level of obligation

A second typology of psychological contracts is developed by Shore & Barksdale (1998). With this model, Shore & Barksdale (1998) want to cope with the problem of content of psychological contracts and shift the focus to more general characteristics which are less situation-bound. They therefore use the two underlying dimensions of degree of balance in employee and employer obligations and the level of obligations. Following Blau's (1964) social exchange theory, Shore & Barksdale (1998) consider psychological contracts as balanced if the perceived obligations of the employee and those of the employer are at the same level. They define the level of obligation as the extent to which the employee and the employer feel obligated to fulfill a particular contract term. Following these two dimensions, four types of psychological contracts are identified: mutual high obligations, mutual low obligations, employee over-obligation, and employee under-obligation.

In case of *mutual high obligations*, the psychological contract is balanced and both parties have high obligations. According to Shore & Barksdale (1998) this type of psychological contract yields the best results in terms of the employees' affective involvement, their intention to stay or leave, their perception of their future with their organization and the perceived support that they receive from the organization. In contrast, a psychological contract of *mutual low obligations* is characterized by balance but with both parties having low obligations. Due to the low perceived employee obligations, Shore & Barksdale (1998) argue that this type of psychological contract yields poorer results for the organization than the previous type. The two other types of contracts are not balanced: *employee over-obligation* and *employee under-obligation*. Because of the unbalance and low employee obligations, this last type of psychological contract is expected to yield the poorest results of all types. Shore & Barksdale (1998) further argue that unbalanced psychological contracts occur less frequently and are only temporary. This argument is based on Blau (1964), who states that a balance in exchange relationships can be expected, since the parties will automatically feel obliged to give something in return for what they receive.

The main strength of this typology is indeed its meaningful conceptualization in terms of general characteristics. Although their study was restricted to a targeted population of working MBA students, this approach offers the promise of generalizability across samples. However, a weakness of this typology may be that their typology is defined in too general characteristics. Within one type of psychological contract, it is possible to discover further differentiations. For instance, mutual high obligations can refer to a situation in which both employees and employers show high obligations with respect to the dimension of time frame leading to an exchange of loyalty versus job security. Or it can refer to high mutual obligations with respect to the dimension of scope leading to an exchange of personal investment versus organizational support. A second weakness is their argument that unbalanced psychological contracts are only temporary and occur less frequently. This statement further assumes that employees have the power to re-negotiate their employment relationship or even change employers. While this may be the case when studying MBA students, unbalanced psychological contracts may occur more frequently when studying a representative working population.

Conclusion

In examining a variety of psychological contracts, we want to build on the strengths of these two typologies as well as avoid their weaknesses. This implies, at the conceptual level, that we rely on theoretical features or dimensions of psychological contracts just as in Rousseau's typology. However, while Rousseau considered only two dimensions – time frame and tangibility,

we broaden our investigation to multiple dimensions which will allow us to explore more than 4 types of psychological contracts. Second, we want to incorporate the notion of balance as in Shore & Barksdale's (1998) typology. This means that we examine not only employee obligations but also employer obligations as perceived by the individual. At the operational level, we move away from a content-oriented approach measuring individual contract terms because of its problems in generalizability across settings. Second, we want to examine a large, representative sample instead of samples using expert informants (human resource managers, Rousseau, 1990) or targeted populations (business students, Shore & Barksdale, 1998; nurses, Rousseau & Tijoriwala, 1996).

A feature-based conceptualization of psychological contracts

In this study we adopt a feature-oriented assessment of psychological contracts. Although it is widely recognized that feature-oriented measures are potentially important for understanding the nature of employment relationships, they are still underdeveloped (Rousseau & Tijoriwala, 1996). As previously defined, this type of assessment compares psychological contracts to one or more underlying attributes or dimensions (Rousseau & Tijoriwala, 1998). Compared to a content-oriented approach which tends to focus on measuring the quality of employment using specific terms, this approach suggests that quality can take a variety of forms. The forms or dimensions that we include are time frame, tangibility, scope, stability, individualization and power distance. While the first four dimensions are adopted from the theoretical framework of Rousseau and McLean Parks (1993) and originally based on Macneil's (1985) contract theory, the two latter ones are derived from reviewing 13 nation-studies on psychological contracts (Rousseau & Schalk, 2000; Sels et al., in revision). We briefly discuss the theoretical meanings of the 6 dimensions.

Following Rousseau and McLean Parks (1993) we define *time frame* as the perceived duration of the employment relationship. This dimension is considered a crucial criterion in distinguishing several types of employment relationships, such as a relational or transactional contract (Rousseau, 1995), a clan or market relationship (Beer et al., 1984), or a make or buy relationship (Williamson, 1985). *Tangibility*, the second dimension, is defined as the degree to which the employee perceives the terms of the contract as unambiguously defined and explicitly specified (McLean Parks, Kidder & Gallagher, 1998). The dimension of *scope* refers to the extent to which the boundary between one's employment relationship and other aspects of one's life is seen as permeable (McLean Parks et al., 1998). *Stability*, the fourth and last dimension of psychological contracts derived from Macneil's contract theory (1985), is

defined as the degree to which the psychological contract is limited in terms of its ability to evolve and change without an implied renegotiation of the terms.

Reviewing the different portrayals of psychological contracts in different countries (Rousseau & Schalk, 2000), we identified two other dimensions necessary for a full understanding of all possible features associated with psychological contracts: power distance and individualization. The dimension of *power distance* is mainly illustrated through concepts such as hierarchy and inequality. Expectations concerning the degree of power distance can be shaped both by employers and employees. Unequal treatment of employees through privileges or differential status treatment, a formal relationship between different hierarchical levels, formal ways of addressing persons, and a paternalistic management style are all employer practices which create expectations of a high power distance relationship. Employees can promote a high power distance relationship by accepting the authority of hierarchy, adopting a conformist attitude and respecting orders. The dimension of *individualization* has already been suggested by Guest (1998) as a possible important dimension to understand the nature of psychological contracts. Individualization refers to the distinction between individually regulated versus collectively regulated employment relationships. An individually regulated employment relationship refers to the possibility of individual negotiation or, in other words, individual arrangements can be made which deviate from the norm. In contrast, in a collectively regulated relationship, little or no individual negotiation is possible because all employment aspects have been decided on collectively.

Constructing reliable psychological contract scales

Following our definition of psychological contracts, each of the six dimensions was operationalized in terms of *employee obligations* as well as *employer obligations*. All 61 items assessing the employer obligations (I expect from my employer that...) and employee obligations (My employer can expect from me that...) were measured on five-point Likert-style response formats anchored by 'strongly disagree' and 'strongly agree'. The construction of reliable scales was conducted in three consecutive stages.

In a first stage, scales were formed after two principal component factor analyses with varimax-rotation to assess the dimensionality of the items: one on the items measuring employer obligations and the second on the items measuring employee obligations. In both analyses, a five-factor solution provided the most conceptually interpretable factor structure. These five factors met the selection criteria of eigenvalues greater than 1.0 with an inclusion of at least three items. Items with loadings above .40 and low cross-loadings were retained to construct scales (Hair, Tatham & Anderson, 1995). Table 1 and 2 present the items, their loadings, and the theoretical psychological contract dimension that each item was initially intended to measure.

Table 1 Principal component analysis on employer obligations

Items	Scale (dimension)	Factor						Items dropped based on CFA
I expect from my employer that he ...		***F1***	***F2***	***F3***	***F4***	***F5***	***F6***	
offers me employment security	Long-term involvement (*time frame*)	.17	**.68**	.11	.10	.16	.01	
Makes a commitment to me for a long time	Long-term involvement	.17	**.76**	.07	.07	.09	.06	
offers me opportunities for career development	Long-term involvement	.09	**.71**	.03	.09	.18	.02	
doesn't immediately fire me if things are going badly	Long-term involvement	.08	**.65**	.26	.10	-.07	-.03	X
offers me a transfer to another job if my current job would disappear	Long-term involvement	.13	**.68**	.08	.06	.00	.03	
does everything in his power to keep me employed	Long-term involvement	.12	**.62**	.26	.14	.24	.09	X
sets agreements regarding my work down in writing	Tangibility (*tangibility*)	**.73**	.03	.05	.04	.11	.04	X
makes specific agreements regarding my work	Tangibility	**.75**	.04	.11	.11	.11	.01	
is very clear about opportunities for advancement in this firm	Tangibility	**.63**	.25	.19	-.01	.14	.03	X
specifically describes the performance appraisal criteria used in this firm	Tangibility	**.77**	.16	.14	.03	.02	.01	
unambiguously describes my obligations within this firms	Tangibility	**.81**	.18	.14	.12	.06	.05	X
unambiguously describes my rights within this firm	Tangibility	**.77**	.21	.14	.14	.12	.01	
personally supports me in difficult periods	Personal treatment (*scope*)	.19	.23	**.59**	.13	.26	.06	X
appreciates me for what I do and for who I am	Personal treatment	.20	.22	**.72**	.13	.14	.04	
considers not only the end result but also my personal effort	Personal treatment	.20	.17	**.70**	.14	.17	-.01	
treats me as a person, not as a number	Personal treatment	.10	.10	**.81**	.20	.06	-.02	
allows me to be myself within this firm	Personal treatment	.10	.07	**.75**	.19	.15	-.04	X
sticks to agreements despite changed circumstances	Carefulness (*stability*)	.24	.17	.21	.14	**.65**	-.03	
is flexible in applying agreements*	Carefulness	.07	.16	.26	.11	**.69**	.12	
considers made agreements as permanently valid	Carefulness	.17	.12	.15	.19	**.78**	.05	
gives differential benefits to superiors and subordinates	/	.04	.02	.03	-.08	-.01	**.89**	X
allows managers in this firm to decide for their subordinates	/	.06	.09	-.03	.05	.12	**.87**	X
treats all employees at the same level equally	Equal treatment (*individualization*)	.02	.12	.18	**.79**	.09	.01	
demands the same from all employees at the same level	Equal treatment	.08	.11	.14	**.86**	.07	.03	
regards agreements as applicable to the whole group, department or team	Equal treatment	.12	.11	.21	**.77**	.15	-.07	
applies the same benefits to all employees at the same level	Equal treatment	.14	.13	.16	**.79**	.14	-.02	
Explained variance (%)		14.4	12.5	12	11.1	7.4	6.1	

* Item is reverse

Table 2 Principal component analysis on employee obligations

Items	Scale (dimension)	Factor						Items dropped based on CFA
My employer can expect from me that I		***F1***	***F2***	***F3***	***F4***	***F5***	***F6***	
enter into a long-term agreement with this firm	Loyalty (*time frame*)	.17	.11	.22	.12	**.78**	-.02	
accept a transfer to a different job in the organization if necessary	Loyalty	.00	.17	.06	.12	**.76**	-.01	
stay with this firm my whole career	Loyalty	.08	.05	.16	.14	**.83**	-.01	
clearly state what is important to me in my work	Open attitude (*tangibility*)	.11	.12	**.76**	.12	.11	.07	
explicitly indicate my career wishes and plans	Open attitude	.14	.14	**.73**	.14	.16	.08	
clearly indicate if problems arise	Open attitude	.08	.20	**.75**	.12	.10	-.01	
make explicit agreements with my boss about work	Open attitude	.12	.15	**.67**	.23	.10	-.01	X
am concerned about this firm, even outside working hours	Personal investment (*scope*)	**.82**	.12	.01	.06	.12	.09	
work extra hours when necessary	Personal investment	**.79**	.11	-.06	.02	.04	.13	
bring own ideas and creativity into this firm	Personal investment	**.78**	.19	.21	.02	.02	.04	
want to develop myself in this firm	Personal investment	**.71**	.22	.28	.14	.14	.08	X
invest time and energy in this firm	Personal investment	**.70**	.31	.22	.09	-.00	.03	X
adjust easily to changes in my work situation*	Flexibility (*stability*)	.12	**.74**	.16	.14	.14	.07	
Tolerate changes when introduced in this firm*	Flexibility	.13	**.80**	.09	.13	.01	.02	X
deal with unpredictable events in my work situation*	Flexibility	.21	**.73**	.18	.13	.06	.02	
adopt a flexible attitude*	Flexibility	.32	**.67**	.20	.18	.06	-.00	X
accept if agreements are being revised*	Flexibility	.18	**.73**	.11	.13	.08	.14	
show respect for my superiors	Respect for authority (*power distance*)	.17	.22	.23	**.66**	.06	-.03	X
adopt a formal attitude to my superiors	Respect for authority	.03	.11	.14	**.78**	.09	.06	
accept that management has a higher status than employees	Respect for authority	.04	.11	.12	**.76**	.13	.10	
adhere to the authority of superiors	Respect for authority	.05	.17	.12	**.78**	.12	.01	
have individual demands that are different than those from other employees*	/	.08	.03	-.01	-.06	-.02	**.89**	X
want to make individual arrangements*	/	.14	.15	.11	.22	-.02	**.79**	X
Explained variance (%)		14.2	13.8	11.4	11.1	9	6.5	

* Item is reverse

In a second stage, the dimensionality of the scales was assessed using two confirmatory factor analyses (using the CALIS procedure in SAS). In evaluating the models tested, we considered four goodness-of-fit measures (Hatcher, 1994). The initial assessments produced chi-square values of 515.74 and 300 degrees of freedom (employer obligations) and 433.35 and 230 degrees of freedom (employee obligations), goodness-of-fit indices of 0.803 (employer obligations) and 0.802 (employee obligations) and Bentler & Bonett's NFI scores of 0.778 and 0.775 respectively, all indicating that the theoretical model was not fully supported by the data. Modification index values indicated that we could improve the model by dropping several items. The items dropped are indicated in the last column of Tables 1 and 2. Each of the goodness-of-fit measures listed in Table 3 indicate that the empirical data conform both optimized five-factor models (Hatcher, 1994). In addition, the optimized models contain no residual values significantly different from zero. Internal consistency of the final scales was assessed by calculating the Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

The third assessment of the factor structures occurred through cross-validation. This approach follows the recommendations of DeVellis (1991) that researchers collect cross-validation data for any new scale on a new sample in order to ascertain whether previously obtained factor analysis results were the result of sample-specificity. We approximated this approach by repeating our confirmatory factor analyses for two sub-samples (Chang, 1999; Sharma, 1996; Bone, Sharma & Shimp, 1989), the first grouping all non-executive employees (n=893), the second representing executive levels (n=213) (see sample description). Each of the goodness-of-fit measures produced excellent results for both sub-samples (e.g. goodness-of-fit indices of 0.9580 and 0.9466 for the employee obligations factor structures; and goodness-of-fit indices of 0.954 and 0.941 for the employer obligations factor structures).

Table 3 Goodness of fit measures

	Optimized model Employer obligations	Optimized model Employee obligations
Goodness of fit index	0.966	0.969
Bentler's comparative fit index	1.000	1.000
Bentler and Bonett's normed fit index	0.951	0.954
Chi-square test (p-value)	1.000	1.000

Employer and employee obligation scales

The five scales in Table 1 represent perceived employer obligations. Factor 1 contains four *long-term involvement* items (α=.79), representing the employee's

expectations concerning a long term involvement by his/her employer (time frame). Factor 2 contains three *tangibility* items (α=.82), measuring the employer obligations regarding the clarity and transparency of the employee's rights and obligations and the mutual arrangements in the context of the employment relationship (tangibility). *Personal treatment* is the third factor (scope). The three items measure the extent to which the individual expects to be treated as a 'person' and not merely as an economic resource (α=.80). Factor 4 is labeled *carefulness regarding arrangements* (stability). This three-item scale refers to the extent to which the employee expects that his/her employer attends to earlier agreed arrangements (α=.70). Factor 5 reflects *equal treatment* (α=.85). These four items assess employee's expectations regarding equal treatment of all employees by the employer (individualization).

The five scales in Table 2 represent perceived employee obligations. Factor 1 contains three *loyalty* items (α=.76), assessing the degree to which employees feel obliged to stay with the organization for a long period of time (time frame). The second three-item factor (α=.78), *open attitude*, measures the extent to which employees will be clear and open with regard to all aspects affecting the employment relationship (tangibility). *Personal investment* is the third factor. This scale (3 items, α=.81) measures the extent to which employees will personally invest in the organization (scope). Factor 4 contains three *flexibility* items (α=.79), referring to the extent to which employees feel obliged to adopt a flexible and tolerant attitude towards internal organizational changes (stability). The last factor is named *respect for authority* (4 items, α=.77) and measures the extent to which employees will show respect for higher authorities within the organization (power distance).

As mentioned before, we added two dimensions to the list of four psychological contract dimensions developed by Rousseau and MacLean Parks (1993): power distance and individualization. Concerning power distance, the results of the exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses indicated that we succeeded in developing a reliable scale for employee obligations – namely 'respect for authority'. However, the items measuring the employer obligations concerning power distance did not result in a reliable scale. The reverse holds for the dimension of individualization. A reliable scale was constructed for employer obligations -namely 'equal treatment'- but not for employee obligations.

Validating clusters of psychological contracts

The main aim of this study is to develop a variety of psychological contracts, based upon the 10 constructed scales, using cluster analysis. To validate and understand the different clusters of psychological contracts, we will develop

cluster profiles as well as assess their relationships with two outcomes: affective commitment and employability.

First, the cluster profiles will be based upon individual, job, formal contract and organizational characteristics. These characteristics will give us a demographical description of the clusters through which we can increase our understanding of the meaning of the psychological contract types. Second, to further differentiate the clusters from each other, we examine the relationships between the clusters and affective commitment and employability. These two outcomes are important areas in which employment relationships may differ (Rousseau, 1995; Shore & Barksdale, 1998). We formulate here for each of the outcomes a few propositions in which the relationship with psychological contract dimensions is explicated. It is not our aim to be exhaustive in formulating propositions but to point to the relevance of these two outcomes to further differentiate the different types of psychological contracts. Affective commitment refers to the degree to which employees feel emotionally attached to the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990). We expect that employee's affective commitment will be high in those clusters that score high on the psychological contract dimension of time frame. The extent to which the relationship is perceived to be long-term is likely to influence employee's attachment to the organization, as found in relational psychological contracts (Rousseau, 1995). We can further expect high affective commitment in clusters in which employee obligations and employer obligations are in balance. Following Shore & Barksdale (1998), a balanced psychological contract contains the element of reciprocity which in turn influences employee's involvement in the organization. This relationship can be expected to be especially present when the level of obligations is high. This implies a high degree of investment made in the relationship through which the employee becomes more attached (Shore & Barksdale, 1998). High affective commitment has been viewed as a means by which employees can repay their employer for treating employees well (Shore & Wayne, 1993).

Employability refers to the perceived ease of movement in the labor market (Trevor, 2001). We expect high employability in those clusters that score high on the dimension of scope, especially with respect to employee obligations. The extent to which employees are willing to invest in work is likely an indicator of their willingness to keep learning and moving (Hall & Moss, 1998), and consequently increases employees' employability. We can further expect high employability in clusters scoring low on the dimension of time frame. The extent to which the relationship is perceived to be short-term is likely to increase employees' feeling of self-reliance, forcing them to take responsibility for their own career. Finally, high employability can be expected in clusters in which the individual regulation of employment relationships is stressed. Clusters with a strong focus on individual arrangements may represent psychological contracts in which employees are expected to make

personal career choices. It is through an individualized employment relationship that employees have to take responsibility for their own learning and development and search for ways to increase their employability.

Method

Sample

The original population for this study consisted of all Belgian employees working in private, public, profit and non-profit organizations with at least 10 employees. We excluded agency workers, employees with 'small' part-time jobs (less than 40% of a full-time job), seasonal workers, trainees and apprentices.

A (disproportionally) stratified random sample was drawn, resulting in a realized sample of 1,106 employees: 36% from public sectors, education and public utilities, 23.2% from manufacturing, 7.5% from the construction industry, 10.7% from retail, hotel and catering sectors, and 22.6% from other commercial service sectors. The stratification variables chosen were gender, age, sector of employment and type of the employment relationship. The latter of these variables was included for stratification since there is no single dominant type of employment relationship in Belgium (Sels, Janssens, Van den Brande & Overlaet, 2000). One important distinction is the difference between contract and statute, as two different mechanisms of formalizing the employment relationship. In the private sector, the employer and employee have the possibility of free negotiation with respect to the content of an employment contract. In the public sector, a statute regulates the relationship with the employer. The content of this statute is unilaterally established by the government-employer. There is no question of 'autonomous expression of will', such as in the contractual relationship. A second distinction still very much present in the Belgian private sector is the difference between blue-collar workers, white-collar workers and executive levels. The contract receives a very different content depending whether you belong to the first, the second or the third group. Labor law treats these categories differently for issues such as protection from dismissal, salary arrangements, the probationary period, guaranteed income, etc. Inclusion of this distinction in our survey design allows us to fully investigate the relevance of differences in 'formal contract' for the nature of psychological contracts. In order to have sufficient data for analyses we needed to select larger samples from the strata with smaller populations ('disproportional'), in casu from the 'executive level' stratum. The realized sample includes 209 civil servants (employed by statute), 326 blue-collar workers, 358 white-collar workers and 213 employees at executive level (private sector). For cross-validation purposes, the first three categories ('non-

executives' sub-sample) were compared with the fourth category ('executives' sub-sample).

The data were collected using a standardized questionnaire. Respondents were interviewed by a total of 60 professional interviewers from a private research office. All interviewers were very experienced in conducting face-to-face interviews and received additional training from members of the research team. In order to minimize the risk of interpretation errors, we organized a briefing on the content of the questionnaire for each individual interviewer.

Measures

The following measures were used to validate the cluster findings. Socio-demographic characteristics were used to develop clusters' profiles and two outcome measures were used to further differentiate the clusters.

Socio-demographic characteristics

First, individual characteristics were measured. They included age (in years), seniority (in years), level of education and trade union membership. Three educational levels were coded: lower (education until the age of 15), average (high school certification) and high (bachelor and master levels). Second, two job characteristics were measured. Hierarchical level was assessed through one of the four levels: senior management, middle management, professional or operational. Pay level (net monthly salary) was coded at three levels: ≤ 1,239 Euro, 1,240 – 1,979 Euro, and ≥ 1,980 Euro. Third, the respondents' formal contract type was measured through asking them their occupational category: blue-collar worker, white-collar worker, executive, or civil servant. Finally, we included two organizational characteristics: 1) the size of the organization (small or 10 to 49 employees; medium-sized or 50-499 employees and large or 500 or more) and 2) the sector of activity (industry including manufacturing and construction; commercial services including retail, hotel and catering; public and non-profit sectors including education and public utilities).

Outcome measures

To further differentiate the types of psychological contracts, we included two outcomes: affective commitment and employability. Affective commitment was measured with 3 items from Allen & Meyer's scale (1990): I feel like part of the family at my organization, I feel emotionally attached to this organization, and I feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization (α=.85). Employability as the perceived ease of movement in the labor market (Trevor, 2001), was measured by three items: It will be difficult for me to find new

employment when leaving this organization, In case I'm dismissed, I'll immediately find a job of equal value, and I'm confident that I would find another job if I start searching (α=.80).

Analysis

To construct a typology of psychological contracts, a cluster analysis was employed. We used Ward's method in SPSS, a hierarchical clustering method that uses euclidean distances. We chose Ward's method because this minimizes the variation in each cluster and seeks to find clusters of equal size. Ward's method is also considered to be the most robust method (Aldenderfer & Blashfield, 1984). Since the number of clusters was difficult to deduce from the dendogram, we carried out a number of different cluster analyses, varying the number of clusters from 2 to 12. The solution with 6 clusters was chosen because of the clearly different pattern of the 10 dimensions and the high number of respondents allocated to one of the six clusters (1,049 of the 1,106). To check the significance of the differences, we used analysis of variance (ANOVA) and post hoc analyses which were carried out on the basis of a Bonferroni test ($p<.05$).

To validate the clusters, we first profiled them in terms of the above-mentioned individual, job, formal contract and organizational characteristics. For each cluster we calculated the average values or the frequency distributions. On the basis of analysis of variance (ANOVA) or Chi-square tests (X^2), we ascertained whether the six clusters demonstrate significant differences in terms of the characteristics that we were studying. Post-hoc analyses were carried out on the basis of a Bonferroni test ($p<.05$). Second, hierarchical regression analyses were used to examine the clusters' outcomes in terms of affective commitment and employability. The 6 clusters where transformed to dummy variables and six separate regression equations were conducted for each of the two outcome variables. In each of the regression analyses we used a different cluster as reference category. We controlled for several variables in order to improve the robustness of the relationships. These control variables were age, gender, formal contract type, educational level and pay level.

Results

Six-cluster solution: Six types of psychological contracts

The cluster analysis showed a 6-cluster solution, with 4 clusters being 'large' (203 till 241 respondents), 1 cluster being 'medium' (151 respondents) and 1 cluster being 'small' (44 respondents). For each cluster, the average scores

(ranging from 0 to 10) and standard deviations on the 10 scales are shown in Table 4.

Table 4 Cluster solution: Means and standard deviations on 10 psychological contract scales

Psychological contract scales	Cluster 1 (N=205; 19,5%)	Cluster 2 (N=203; 19,5%)	Cluster 3 (N=205; 19.5%)	Cluster 4 (N=241; 23%)	Cluster 5 (N=44; 4%)	Cluster 6 (N=151; 14.5%)	Total (N=1049; 100%)
Employer obligations	$\overline{X}$ (SD)	$\overline{X}$ (SD)	$\overline{X}$ (SD)	$\overline{X}$ (SD)	$\overline{X}$ (SD)	$\overline{X}$ (SD)	$\overline{X}$ (SD)
Long-term involvement	7,64 (1,28)	7,04 (1,57)	9,32 (0.86)	9,42 (0,78)	4,50 (1,88)	8,05 (1,61))	8,18* (1,76) 3,4>6>1>2>5
Tangibility	7,62 (1,26)	6,46 (1,66)	8,16 (1,49)	9,00 (1,31)	6,86 (1,83)	7,46 (1,58)	7,76* (1,71) 4>3>1,6>2,5
Personal treatment	8,68 (1,34)	7,29 (1,50)	8,98 (1,18)	9,72 (0,63)	7,89 (1,48)	9,09 (1,02)	8,74* (1,44) 4>3,6>1>5>2
Carefulness reg. arrangements	7,33 (1,21)	6,19 (1,34)	8,20 (1,33)	8,69 (1,57)	6,19 (1,27)	7,92 (1,57)	7,63* (1,67) 4>3,6>1>2,5
Equal treatment	8,84 (1,15)	6,77 (1,54)	9,05 (1,37)	9,19 (1,37)	7,08 (2,03)	8,88 (1,18)	8,49* (1,64) 1,3,4,6>2,5
Employee obligations	$\overline{X}$ (SD)	$\overline{X}$ (SD)	$\overline{X}$ (SD)	$\overline{X}$ (SD)	$\overline{X}$ (SD)	$\overline{X}$ (SD)	$\overline{X}$ (SD)
Loyalty	6,58 (1,65)	7,07 (1,39)	9,48 (0,74)	9,54 (0,78)	3,54 (1,39)	8,13 (1,56)	8,02* (1,98) 3,4>6>2>1>5
Open attitude	7,90 (1,18)	7,20 (1,24)	8,31 (1,39)	9,74 (0,61)	7,71 (1,08)	8,54 (1,26)	8,35* (1,43) 4>3,6>1,5>2
Personal investment	4,73 (2,06)	5,74 (2,02)	4,74 (2,06)	8,20 (1,81)	7,22 (2,07)	8,56 (1,54)	6,38* (2,51) 4,6>5>2>1,3
Flexibility	6,86 (1,36)	7,09 (1,24)	7,43 (1,61)	9,21 (1,06)	7,44 (1,63)	8,63 (1,95)	7,83* (1,61) 4>6>3,5>1,2
Respect for authority	7,23 (1,34)	6,39 (1,47)	7,61 (1,75)	8,87 (1,40)	6,04 (1,88)	8,06 (1,38)	7,59* (1,75) 4>6>1,3>2,5

*p F(ANOVA) < .05

Concerning employer obligations, respondents in cluster 1 have average scores on all scales, except for equal treatment on which they score high. The scores regarding employee obligations also approximate the average, except those on personal investment and flexibility. These scores are far below average. In other words, these employees have high expectations towards their employer, but they perceive themselves as having low obligations towards their employer. Therefore, we label this type of psychological contract an *'instrumental' psychological contract.*

Respondents in cluster 2 have low scores on all scales, both concerning employer and employee obligations. On most scales they actually have the lowest score of the six clusters, namely on tangibility, personal treatment, carefulness regarding arrangements, equal treatment and open attitude. Due to these low scores, this psychological contract is called *'weak'.*

Respondents in cluster 3 score very high on two scales: equal treatment and long-term involvement. They have average scores on the other employer obligations' scales: tangibility, personal treatment and carefulness regarding arrangements. Concerning employee obligations, they score very high on loyalty and very low on personal investment. They have average scores on open attitude, flexibility and respect for authority. Since the emphasis in this type of psychological contract is on long-term involvement in exchange for loyalty, we call this type a *'loyal' psychological contract.*

Respondents in cluster 4 score high on all scales, on both employer and employee obligations. Except for their score on personal investment, respondents in this cluster actually have the highest score of the six clusters on all scales. Due to these high scores, we call their contract a *'strong' psychological contract.*

Concerning employer obligations, respondents in cluster 5 have low scores on all scales, but particularly very low scores on long-term involvement. With regard to employee obligations, they also have low scores on most of them, but particularly on loyalty. They have however rather high scores on personal investment. Due to the emphasis on low expectations concerning long-term involvement in exchange for little loyalty, we call this type an *'unattached' psychological contract.*

Finally, respondents in cluster 6 have average scores on all employer obligations' scales, except for equal treatment on which they score high. Regarding employee obligations, they also score average, except on personal investment and flexibility on which they score far above average. In other words, these employees have moderate expectations from their employer, while they perceive themselves as having high obligations towards their employer. Therefore, we call this type of psychological contract an *'investing' psychological contract.*

Validating the six-cluster solution

Clusters' profiles

To validate the clusters, we first developed profiles of the respondents in the 6 clusters (see Table 5). We present the clusters having the most pronounced profile first, followed by clusters that are related but different.

Table 5 Profiles of the respondents in the six clusters

Characteristics		Cl 1	Cl 2	Cl 3	Cl 4	Cl 5	Cl 6	All respondents
Age (in years)	$\overline{X}$	36.1	37.4	38.3	41.5	31.2	37.8	38.1* 4>1,2,3,6>5
Seniority (in years)	$\overline{X}$	10.7	10.3	13.5	15.3	4.8	10.7	12* 1,2,3,4,6>5 3>1,2 4>1,2,6
Level of education								
Low		25.2%	19.6%	31.8%	22.3%	4.7%	10%	21.7%+
Average		42.6%	36.2%	44.8%	38.2%	14%	31.3%	37.9%+
High		32.2%	44.2%	23.4%	39.5%	81.4%	58.7%	40.4%+
Total		100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Trade union membership		56.6%	48.8%	66.2%	51.3%	31.8%	33.3%	51.3%+
Hierarchical level								
Senior management		1.9%	4.4%	1.5%	8.3%	15.9%	13.2%	6%+
Middle management		14.6%	15.8%	7.8%	20.8%	18.2%	13.9%	15%+
Professional		8.3%	12.3%	6.8%	10.8%	25%	13.2%	10.8%+
Operational		75.2%	67.5%	83.9%	60%	41%	59.6%	68.3%+
Total		100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Net salary								
≤ 1,239 Euro		63.9%	58.6%	68.5%	48.5%	45.2%	43.5%	56.6%+
1,240-1,979 Euro		27.7%	32.3%	26.8%	34%	38.1%	38.6%	31.8%+
≥ 1,980 Euro		8.4%	9.1%	4.7%	17.5%	16.7%	17.9%	11.6%+
Total		100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Formal contract								
Blue-collar worker		37.5%	28%	41%	24%	11%	17%	29%+
White-collar worker		36%	31%	28%	32%	46%	34%	33%+
Executive level		14.5%	23%	8%	22%	36%	30%	20%+
Civil servant		12%	18%	23%	22%	7%	19%	18%+
Total		100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Sector								
Industry		31%	27.1%	30.9%	30.8%	15.9%	24.5%	28.6%+
Commercial services		34%	33.5%	30.4%	32.9%	61.4%	36.4%	34.4%+
Public/non-profit services		35%	39.4%	38.7%	36.3%	22.7%	39.1%	36.9%+
Total		100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Size of the organization								
10-49 employees		22.5%	21.2%	12.2%	17.8%	27.2%	32.7%	20.8%+
50-499 employees		34.8%	26.1%	31.4%	24.9%	36.4%	22%	28.4%+
500 employees and more		42.7%	52.7%	56.4%	57.3%	36.4%	45.3%	50.8%+
Total		100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

*p F(ANOVA) < .05; +p X^2(Pearson, Chi-square) < .05

A first pronounced profile is that of employees with a *loyal psychological contract* (cluster 3), being poorly educated blue-collar workers or civil servants.

These respondents have the lowest level of education with 31.8% of them having schooling only until the age of 15. They are mainly blue-collar workers (41%) or civil servants (23%), having operational jobs (83.9%). A large percentage is member of a trade union: 66.2% as compared to the average of 51.3%. Their net monthly salary is in the lowest pay category: 68.5% earn less than Euro 1,240 net per month. Relatively more of them are employed in large organizations of more than 500 employees (56.4%).

Employees with an *instrumental psychological contract* (cluster 1) have a low level of education, but not as low as those with a loyal psychological contract. They also have mainly operational jobs (75.2%) but they are both blue-collar (37.5%) and white-collar workers (36%). They are more employed in medium-sized organizations (34.8%) with a net monthly salary in the lower pay categories, but not as low as employees with a loyal psychological contract. A large percentage is member of a trade union: 56.6% as compared to the average of 51.3%.

Unlike employees with an instrumental or loyal psychological contract, those with a *weak psychological contract* (cluster 2) have an average rather than a low level of education. They also have jobs at all hierarchical levels. The distribution of their net monthly salary across the various pay categories follows the average distribution. In other words, the overall profile of the employees with a weak psychological contract is not very pronounced, having average scores on all characteristics.

Another pronounced profile is that of employees with an *unattached psychological contract* (cluster 5), being young, highly educated white-collar or executive employees. They are the most educated employees of all six clusters - 81.4% have a high educational degree-, with an average age of 31. They mainly fulfill professional jobs (25%), middle management jobs (18.2%), and even senior management jobs (15.9%). They are employed in the commercial services (61.4%) and in small and medium-sized organizations (respectively 27.2% and 36.4%). Their net monthly salary is in the higher pay category. Only a small percentage of them are member of a trade union: 31.8% versus the average of 51.3%.

Employees with an *investing psychological contract* (cluster 6) have a high level of education, but not as high as those with an unattached psychological contract. However, their net monthly salary is in the highest pay category: 17.9% earn Euro 1,980 or more net per month. Compared to the average, they have more senior management jobs (13.2%) and are more employed in small organizations (32.7%). Like employees with an unattached psychological contract, only a small percentage is member of a trade union: 33.3% as compared with 51.3% on average.

Finally, employees with a *strong psychological contract* (cluster 4) are somewhat older than respondents in all other clusters (41.5 years) which is further reflected in their high seniority (15.3 years). Compared to the average, they

have relatively more middle management jobs (20.8%) and more of them are civil servants (22%). They are also more employed in large organizations (57.3%). Their net monthly salary is in the higher wage categories: 17.5% earn Euro 1,980 or more net per month.

Clusters' outcomes

The results of the regression analyses examining the relationships between affective commitment and employability and the six clusters are presented in Table 6 and 7. In each of the models we compare the level of affective commitment (1-6) or employability (7-12) of five (dummy scored) clusters with the remaining sixth cluster that serves as the reference category.

Table 6 Results of hierarchical regression analyses: Affective commitment as dependent variable

Intercept	Reference category (intercept) = Unattached (Model 1)	Weak (Model 2)	Instrumental (Model 3)	Loyal (Model 4)	Investing (Model 5)	Strong (Model 6)
Unattached	/	-.036	-.037	-.078 *	-.197 ***	-.226 ***
Weak	.000 [1]	/	.007	-.041	-.215 ***	-.263 ***
Instrumental	.006	-.017	/	-.047	-.221 ***	-.268 ***
Loyal	.075 *	.026	.031	/	-.175 ***	-.215 ***
Investing	.245 ***	.234 ***	.238 ***	.208 ***	/	.009
Strong	.329 ***	.319 ***	.323 ***	.287 ***	.103 *	/
R^2	.192 ***	.193 ***	.193 ***	.194 ***	.182 ***	.176 ***
F	16,417 ***	16,553 ***	13,536 ***	16,624 ***	15,411 ***	14,780 ***

[1] Standardized Beta coefficients; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Control variables: age, gender, educational level, occupational category, pay level

Table 7 Results of hierarchical regression analyses: Employability as dependent variable

Intercept	Reference category (intercept) = Unattached (Model 7)	Weak (Model 8)	Instrumental (Model 9)	Loyal (Model 10)	Investing (Model 11)	Strong (Model 12)
Unattached	/	.073 *	.058	.108 ***	.065 *	.073 *
Weak	-.075 *	/	-.003	.053	-.028	-.004
Instrumental	-.037	.012	/	.052	-.019	.003
Loyal	-.106 **	-.059	-.059 *	/	-.075 *	-.068 *
Investing	-.057	.014	.020	.056	/	.014
Strong	-.068 *	.003	.003	.030	-.020	/
R^2	.136 ***	.139 ***	.139 ***	.138 ***	.139 ***	.139 ***
F	10,893 ***	11,143 ***	11,134 ***	11,106 ***	11,151 ***	11,143 ***

[1] Standardized Beta coefficients; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Control variables: age, gender, educational level, occupational category, pay level

Table 6 indicates that the levels of affective commitment in the two clusters of investing and strong psychological contracts are significantly higher than in the reference clusters of unattached (model 1), weak (model 2), instrumental (model 3) and loyal (model 4) psychological contracts. As expected, the finding of high commitment in strong psychological contracts suggests that a high level of obligations from both parties signals a high degree of investment through which employees become more attached. Contrary to our expectations, unbalanced psychological contracts can show higher affective commitment than balanced ones. The unbalance in investing psychological contracts did not seem to prevent employees from becoming more attached to the employing organization compared to employees who find themselves in more balanced types such as the unattached (model 1), weak (model 2) and loyal (model 4) psychological contracts. These respondents' high score on the employee obligations' scales of personal investment and flexibility seems to reflect an inherent willingness to become committed to an organization.

While the cluster of loyal psychological contracts shows significantly lower affective commitment than the investing and strong ones (model 4), this type of contract scores significantly higher than unattached psychological contracts (model 1). Because respondents in this cluster score high on both long-term involvement and loyalty, this finding confirms our expectation that obligations concerning a long term relationship from both employer and employee increases employees' affective commitment.

Table 7 presents the results of the relationships between the clusters and employability. They indicate that respondents with an unattached psychological contract score higher on employability than respondents with a weak (model 8), loyal (model 10), investing (model 11) and also strong (model 12) psychological contract. Comparing unattached with loyal and weak psychological contracts, the finding suggests that the level of personal investment may differentiate between these types of psychological contract. Respondents with a loyal and weak psychological contract score very low on this scale, compared to the ones with an unattached psychological contract. However, respondents with a strong psychological contract score also high on personal investment but they show lower levels of employability than those with an unattached contract.

Comparing unattached with loyal (model 10) and strong (model 12) contracts further indicates that time frame and individualization may be two psychological contract dimensions differentiating between these types of contracts. Employees with loyal and strong psychological contracts score high on long-term involvement and loyalty (time frame) as well as on equal treatment (individualization) while unattached employees score low on these obligations. So, the combination of low expectations regarding personal investment

and high expectations regarding loyalty, long-term involvement and equal treatment seems to be linked with the lower employability of loyal employees.

Discussion and conclusion

This study showed a variety of psychological contracts when examining psychological contracts following a feature-oriented approach and across a large, representative sample, covering different hierarchical layers and relevant professional categories. Six different clusters were found - loyal, instrumental, weak, unattached, investing and strong psychological contracts, all having different patterns of employer and employee obligations, a different profile and different levels of affective commitment and employability. Affective commitment was mainly found in the clusters of strong, investing and loyal psychological contracts. Besides the level of obligations, it seems that the employer obligation of long term involvement and the employee obligation of personal investment, flexibility and loyalty are related to high affective commitment. Employability was higher for employees with an unattached psychological contract, compared to those with loyal, weak and strong psychological contracts. Here, it seems that the combination of the employer obligations of short-term investment and individual treatment and the employee obligations of personal investment and short-term perspective are related to their perceived ease of movement in the labor market. They are also young and highly educated white-collar or executive employees.

A major contribution of a feature-based approach of psychological contracts is that it allowed us to study employer and employee obligations across a variety of settings. Through examining obligations using the six dimensions of time frame, tangibility, scope, stability, individualization and power distance, we were able to construct a meaningful conceptualization for all four professional categories in our sample: blue-collar workers, white-collar workers, executives and civil servants. This feature-oriented approach further allowed us to identify multiple types of psychological contracts in which combinations of different dimensions are prevalent. Especially these combinations of dimensions differentiate the findings of this study from those of Rousseau (1995) and Shore & Barksdale (1998).

For instance, the long-term perspective of the relational contract (Rousseau, 1995) can be found in three clusters: loyal, strong and investing psychological contract. Despite this similarity, the three clusters differ with respect to other dimensions. For example, employees with loyal psychological contracts score low on personal investment while employees with investing psychological contracts score high on this employee obligation. Employees with strong psychological contracts score in between these two types. In addition, some of the clusters seem similar to Shore & Barksdale's (1998) typology. For example,

instrumental psychological contracts seem to correspond to 'employee under-obligation.' However, the latter typology only indicates the existence of unbalance while the findings of this study also indicate the specificity of the unbalance. Specifically, the unbalance in instrumental contracts is characterized by equal treatment by the employer versus low personal investment and flexibility from the employee. Similar, the unbalance of 'employee over-obligation' psychological contract is complemented in this study by the specification of the particular dimensions that are in unbalance. Employees with investing psychological contracts have 'over-obligated' contracts but we also know that the unbalance is characterized by the employee obligations of flexibility and personal investment. So, a feature-based approach allows researchers to examine the quality of employment relationship through a variety of dimensions or forms.

Despite this contribution, there are some shortcomings in the way we operationalized and measured the features. Reviewing the 13 nation-studies organized by Rousseau & Schalk (2000), we identified power distance and individualization as two additional relevant features. However, no reliable scales could be constructed for employer obligations with respect to power distance and employee obligations regarding individualization. The challenge for future research on psychological contract dimensions is to further study the relevance of these two dimensions and their operationalization. A second shortcoming refers to the exclusion of the employers' perspective in measuring the psychological contract dimensions. Future research including the employers' perspective may lead to stimulating questions concerning the covariation or differentiation of the two parties' perceived obligations.

Considering the recent interest in the so-called 'new employment deal', this study points to the danger of studying small and selective samples such as employees of fast growing organizations in the new service industries, MBA students or alumni, and professional groups such as consultants. While these studies offer insight into the specific nature of this new employment relationship, the selectiveness might lead us to a misrepresentation of the directions and speed of changes in psychological contracts. Based upon the findings of this study, we must conclude that, at least for the Belgian labor market, the transformation from traditional employment relationships towards a new deal is restricted to a very small group of young and highly educated professionals and managers. Employees with an unattached psychological contract, which resembles the so-called new deal, represent only 4% of the total working population. So, the evolution of the employment relationship may not be that revolutionary. At the same time, we want to comment on the generalizability of these findings. This study is conducted in Belgium and certain conditions in this country may favor traditional employment relationships above new ones. For instance, the value of job security and the practice of collective agreements between trade unions and organizations are two important cultural and insti-

tutional elements (Sels et al., 2000) that tend to strengthen loyal psychological contracts. Future research may therefore want to explicitly consider the cultural and institutional context when studying the transformation of employment relationships. The questions that arise are: Are the 10 scales as identified in this study relevant to understand the nature of psychological contracts in other cultural and socio-economic contexts?, Is the six-cluster solution transferable to other institutional settings?, and, Within each institutional setting, what is the relative importance of the respective clusters in terms of their size?

Another reflection refers to the occurrence of investing and instrumental psychological contracts, two unbalanced contracts. Employees with these two psychological contracts represent 34% of the respondents. This large number is in contrast with Shore & Barksdale's (1998) study where the number of people in the unbalanced exchange types was much smaller than the number in the balanced exchange relationship types. According to Shore & Barksdale (1998), this small number of unbalanced contracts is consistent with the social exchange literature which contends that people seek balance in exchange relationships (Blau, 1964). However, this study questions the generalizability of this argument. As pointed out earlier, it assumes that employees have the power to renegotiate their contract. This negotiation level may be especially low for employees with an instrumental psychological contract who have a low level of education, mainly operational jobs and a low net monthly salary. Employees with an investing psychological contract are expected to have more negotiation power. They are highly educated, almost half of them fulfill senior and middle management or professional jobs, and they receive high salaries. It is therefore not very likely that lack of power is the main reason why these employees do not adjust their level of employee obligations or change towards other employers. Even more, this group of employees shows high affective commitment. This is also in contradiction with Shore & Barksdale's (1998) study in which balanced contracts lead to better outcomes than unbalanced contracts. The reason why employees with investing psychological contracts show high affective commitment and don't seem to indicate a need to move to a more balanced psychological contract is difficult to identify. As previously mentioned, these employees show especially high employee obligations with respect to flexibility and personal investment. A speculation may be that certain personal characteristics such as career anchors are the main drivers of this type of psychological contract. Or otherwise, HRM practices stimulating commitment may be in place in these employees' organizations. It was beyond the scope of this study to examine the antecedents of types of psychological contracts. However, future research may want to study the relationships between dimensions of psychological contracts and possible antecedents such as HRM practices and/or individual characteristics.

To conclude, a feature-oriented approach to psychological contracts offers important opportunities to study employment relationships. In this study, it

provided the possibility to examine multiple types of psychological contracts using a representative sample. This led to meaningful clusters of employees having different perceptions of employer and employee obligations. These clusters were further validated by comparing their socio-demographic profiles as well as by assessing their relationships with affective commitment and employability.

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